



Taproot of Trust by Stephen R. Covey

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Efforts to empower employees and to align systems will be forever frustrated in cultures of low or no trust.

I have long advocated a natural, gradual, day-by-day, step-by-step, sequential approach to personal and organizational development. My feeling is that any product or program, whether it deals with losing weight or mastering skills, that promises "quick, free, instant, and easy" results is probably not based on correct principles. And yet virtually all advertising uses one or more of these words to entice us to buy. Small wonder many of us are addicted to "quick fix" approaches.

In this article, I suggest that real character and skill development are irrevocably related to natural laws and governing principles; when we observe these, we gain the strength to break with the past, to overcome old habits, to change our paradigms, and to achieve primary greatness and interpersonal effectiveness.

Of course, we do not live alone on islands, isolated from other people. We are born into families; we grow up in societies; we become students of schools, members of other organizations. Once into our professions, we find that our jobs require us to interact frequently and effectively with others. If we fail to learn and apply the principles of interpersonal effectiveness, we can expect our progress to slow or stop.

And so we must also acquire the attitudes, skills, and strategies for creating and maintaining trustful relationships. In effect, once we become relatively independent, our challenge is to become effectively interdependent with others. To do this, we must practice empathy and synergy in our efforts to be proactive and productive.

Very early in my life, at age 20, I was assigned to manage the work of others and to train men and women more than twice my age in the principles and skills of effective management and leadership. It was a humbling, frightening experience.

Like me, most people once on their own soon find themselves in some sort of "management" position. Often these responsibilities come before we are ready for them. But we learn by doing and by making mistakes, and over time we gain some degree of competence and confidence.

When we become leaders of organizations, we encounter a whole new set of problems. Some of these are chronic, others acute. Many are as common to Fortune 500 companies as they are to families, small businesses, and volunteer groups. Certain conditions of organizational effectiveness apply across the board.

No leader can afford to forget that personal and organizational integrity are closely intertwined. Nor can any leader afford to lose sight of the mission and shared vision - the constitution of the corporation.

### **Personal Dilemmas**

Throughout history, the most significant breakthroughs have been breaks with the old ways of thinking - the old models and paradigms. Principle-centered leadership is a breakthrough paradigm, a new way of thinking that helps resolve the classic dilemmas of modern living: How do we achieve and maintain a wise and renewing balance between work and family and between personal and professional areas of life in the middle of constant crises and pressures? How do we adhere to simplicity in the thick of terrible complexity?

How do we maintain a sense of direction in today's wilderness where well-developed road maps (strategies and plans) are rendered useless by rapid change that often hits us from the blind side?

How do we look at human weakness with genuine compassion and understanding rather than accusation and self-justification?

How can we be genuinely happy for the successes and competencies of another?

How do we replace prejudice (the tendency to pre-judge and categorize people in order to manipulate them) with a sense of reverence and discovery in order to promote learning, achievement, and excellence in people?

How can we be empowered (and empower other people) with confidence and competence to solve problems and seize opportunities without being or fearing loose cannons?

How do we encourage the desire to change and improve without creating more pain than gain?

How can we be contributing members of a complementary team based on mutual respect and the valuing of diversity and pluralism?

Where do we start, and how do we keep recharging our batteries to maintain momentum for learning, growing, and improving?

## **Management Dilemmas**

Principle-centered leadership will also help you to resolve the classic managerial and organizational dilemmas: How do we maintain control, and yet give people the freedom and autonomy they need to be effective in their work?

How can we have a culture characterized by change, flexibility, and continuous improvement and still maintain a sense of stability and security?

How do we get our people, the culture, aligned with the strategy so that everyone in the organization is as committed to the strategy as those who formulated it?

How do we unleash the creativity, resourcefulness, talent, and energy of the vast majority of the present workforce whose jobs neither require nor reward such use?

How do we clearly see that the dilemma of whether to play tough hardball to produce a bottom line or to play softball to "be nice" to people is based on a false dichotomy?

How do we serve and eat the lunch of champions (feedback) and then the dinner of champions (course correction) within the context of the breakfast of champions (vision)?

How do we turn a mission statement into a constitution - the supreme guiding force of the entire organization instead of a bunch of nebulous, meaningless, cynicism-inducing platitudes?

How do we create a culture where management treats employees as customers and uses them as local experts?

How do we internalize the principles of total quality and continuous improvement in all our people at all levels of the organization when they are so cynical and fatigued from the disillusionment in the wake of all the past programs of the month?

How do we create team spirit and harmony among departments and people who have been attacking, criticizing, contending for scarce resources, playing political games and working from hidden agendas for years?

Perhaps you have asked yourself one or more of these questions as you have grappled with real-life challenges in your personal life and in your organizations. As you gain an understanding of the basic

principles of effective leadership, you will be empowered to answer these and other tough questions by yourself. Without this understanding, you will continue to use hit-and-miss, seat-of-the-pants approaches to living and problem solving.

### **Four Levels, Four Principles**

Principle-centered leadership is practiced from the inside out on four levels: 1) personal (my relationship with myself); 2) interpersonal (my relationships and interactions with others); 3) managerial (my responsibility to get a job done with others); and 4) organizational (my need to organize people to recruit them, train them, compensate them, build teams, solve problems, and create aligned structure, strategy, and systems).

Each level is "necessary but insufficient," meaning we have to work at all levels on the basis of certain master principles.

### **Trustworthiness at the Personal Level**

Trustworthiness is based on character (what you are as a person) and competence (what you can do). If you have faith in my character but not in my competence, you still wouldn't trust me.

Many good, honest people gradually lose their professional trustworthiness because they allow themselves to become "obsolete" inside their organizations. Without character and competence, we won't be considered trustworthy. Nor will we show much wisdom in our choices and decisions. Without meaningful, ongoing professional development, there is little trustworthiness or trust.

### **Trust at the Interpersonal Level**

Trustworthiness is the foundation of trust. Trust is the emotional bank account between two people, which enables two parties to have a win-win performance agreement. If two people trust each other, based on the trustworthiness of each other, they can then enjoy clear communication, empathy, synergy, and productive interdependency. If one is incompetent, training and development can help. But if one has a character flaw, he or she must make and keep promises to increase internal security, improve skills, and rebuild relationships of trust. Trust or the lack of it is at the root of the success or failure in relationships and in the bottom-line results of business, industry, education, and government.

### **Empowerment at the Management Level**

If you have no or low trust, how are you going to manage people? If you think your people lack character or competence, how would you manage them? When you don't have trust, you have to control people. But if you have high trust, how do you manage people? You don't supervise them, they supervise themselves. You become a source of help. You set up a performance agreement so they understand

what's expected. You overlap their needs with the needs of the organization. You have accountability, but they participate in the evaluation of their performance based on the terms of the agreement. People are empowered to judge themselves because their knowledge transcends any measurement system. If you have a low-trust culture, you have to use measurement because people will tell you what they think you want to hear.

### **Alignment at the Organizational Level**

If you have a low-trust culture with a control style of management, you will have a hierarchal organization with small spans of control. You will resort to "go-fer" delegation and prescribe and manage methods. Your information system will gather immediate information on results so you can take decisive corrective actions. Your motivation system will be the carrot-and-stick. Such primitive systems may enable you to survive against soft competition, but you are easy prey for tough competitors.

If you have a high-trust culture, your organization can be very flat and extremely flexible with large spans of control. Why? People are supervising themselves. They are doing their jobs cheerfully without being reminded because you have built an emotional bank account with them. You've got commitment and empowerment because you have built the culture around a common vision on the basis of certain bedrock principles, and you are constantly striving to align strategy, style, structure, and systems with your professed mission (your constitution) and with the realities out there in the environment (the streams).

My challenge is this: when you find something out of alignment, work on it developmentally at all four levels from the inside out on the basis of the four master principles.